No. 5 in the series, Field Studies in Psi-Pathology

PROJECT ROTSUC*

Phase I

Dennis Stillings

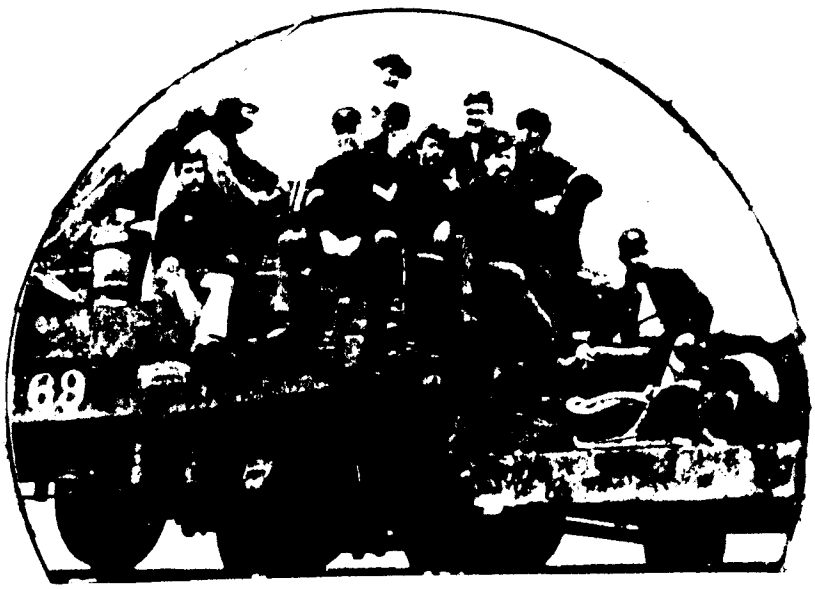
*Randi Ought To Sell Used Cars

Dedicated to the memory of

Adam Jersin

"If a trick is well done, it doesn't look like a trick. It looks real."
--JAMES RANDI

"I consider myself a knowledgeable student of conjuring, yet I am frequently mystified by new tricks."
--MARTIN GARDNER



James Runty and his notorious DOGPLOP gang, shown here after taking over a train.

INTRODUCTION

Those familiar with No. 3 in the series Field Studies in Psi-Pathology, "Tricking the Tricksters," will recognize that both the present paper and that earlier one are narrowly circumscribed replications of an uncontrolled experiment by Mr. James Randi. We make no claims to originality.

The main purpose of Randi's experiment was to show that strong commitment to a belief system undermines the ability to observe phenomena correctly and adequately. We feel that Randi's experiment, code-named Project Alpha, was much too elaborate for the purpose. What James Randi demonstrated--and all he demonstrated--is that some people, when they are performing their routine work and unprepared to be infiltrated by skilled illusionists, trained for specific forms of deception in the fields in which they work, can be fooled for varying periods of time. In addition, the beliefs that people have can be played to, in order to prolong the period of deception.

While we regard this conclusion to be as trivial as anything one could find in, e.g., the literature of behaviorist psychology, we felt constrained to replicate Randi's work on a limited scale, so that everyone knows for sure that he was right.

"Tricking the Tricksters" was initiated as a "probe." No specific hypotheses were stated prior to the "experiment."* What was expected was far different from what happened. In effect, the subjects of this initial effort created the results themselves. We therefore felt it important to carry out the next step more precisely. The information obtained from "Tricking the Tricksters" allowed for a clear formulation of Project ROTSUC. In fact, Project ROTSUC has more the physiological quality of testing a reflex.

*A fake issue of the Archaeus Project Newsletter was sent to Mike Edwards and Steve Shaw, headlining a fund set up for Archaeus to carry on psi research. This experiment with its spin-offs was code-named Project ROTSS (Randi Ought To Sell Shoes).

THE EXPERIMENT

Based on the results of Project ROTSS, the hypothesis was put forward that James Randi was so committed to a negative belief system with regard to psychic research, and anxious to undermine work in this field, that given opportunity to exercise those beliefs in a real-life situation, he would accept that "real-life situation" at face value, losing to a great extent his ability to observe correctly and to make reasonable judgments.

Project ROTSUC was designed to test this hypothesis. The test was initiated before "Tricking the Tricksters" was completed. The above hypothesis was firmly established by this study. To quote Randi (from the Project Alpha material): "The experiment could have been continued indefinitely. However, in order that its results may be evaluated and utilized by the scientific community, and in accordance with the original intention of the experiment, it is now terminated." *

For purposes of this test, it was assumed that James Randi would be very pleased to hear that Medtronic stockholders were upset over the company's "investments" in psychic research. We therefore created a fictitious investment counselor, Reid Becker, who wrote Randi a letter (on phony letterhead). The letter is reproduced on p. 4.

*Actually, all I would like the reader to do is laugh his head off.

CHARON
INVESTMENTS

April 15, 1983

Mr. James Randi
51 Lennox Avenue
Rumford, New Jersey 07760

Dear Mr. Randi:

I was referred to you by way of the New York bureau of the Associated Press and by DISCOVER magazine.

A rumour has come to my ears that Medtronic, Inc., the pacemaker company in Minneapolis, has received a "Uri" award for contributing a large sum of money to psychic research.

A few of my clients hold stock in Medtronic and I would be very interested in seeing the text of your news release on this award and any additional documentation you might have.

Sincerely,

R Becker

Reid Becker
Program Manager
CHARON INVESTMENTS
2050 Harrison Lane
Mound, Minnesota 55364

RFB:je

As expected, Randi responded by sending a copy of the Uri Award press release on Discover magazine as well as a copy of the article from Discover on the "Psychic Abscam." Thus, Randi had not only "bought" Reid Becker, but he believed that (1) a responsible broker would base his investment advice on something other than stock performance, and (2) investment brokers use photocopier-produced letterhead with no printed telephone number or address. (In all fairness, it is true that quality of the paper in the stationery and the envelope was good.) Look up Charon in your dictionary of Greek mythology.

Up to this point, ROTSUC remained limp. We had to wait for further developments--which were not long in coming.

On June 6, about the same time as Randi was sending out a flurry of lawsuit threats to Walter Uphoff and others, Reid Becker received a letter--no, two identical letters--from Randi, presumably to make sure that Reid Becker got one. Old Reid got them both.

Since Randi has indicated considerable sensitivity about quoting his letters, I will summarize the contents in my own words. Randi acknowledges the earlier correspondence and informs Reid Becker that Medtronic has not invested in psychic research [why the term "invested"?]. He goes on to say that the information about Medtronic and the $250,000 was distributed by Dennis Stillings (!) and that, if Stillings' prank has caused Reid Becker any problems, he, Reid Becker, should contact me. He is given my address. Randi concludes by piously bemoaning the way things are nowadays, when people like Dennis Stillings can do the things they do.... (I kid you not!)

So what does all this tell us?

Randi not only accepted without question that a major company would donate directly to psi research, that a reputable stockbroker would base his judgment on company donations, but he apparently believed that Becker had acted, and that Randi needed to "get it straight" so that Becker would suffer no inconvenience. Randi persists in saying that Dennis Stillings tied Medtronic to the funding, but readers of "Tricking the Tricksters" know better. These facts give us broad support for our assumptions about Randi's disbelief-induced gullibility.

But that is not all. We could ask, in how many ways could Randi have detected this hoax?

(1) Reid Becker is in the same area as I am.
(2) Reid Becker uses questionable letterhead with no phone number or address on it. The original

address on the envelope is crossed out, and a new one is typed in.

(3) The address given is my former address in Mound, Minnesota, which is still listed in the phone book for Minneapolis under my name! He could have tried to call Reid Becker.

Again, as was the case with Project ROTSS, the simplest checking would have revealed the trick. Mike Edwards was in Minneapolis, questioning me quite energetically about ROTSUC, yet he didn't check in a phone book or try to call Reid Becker.* But then, Randi didn't try very hard either.

Project ROTSUC is very similar to ROTSS. Randi & Company knew I was going to pull something soon. They had plenty of opportunity to check out simple details, yet they refused to do so. Sound familiar?

SUMMARY

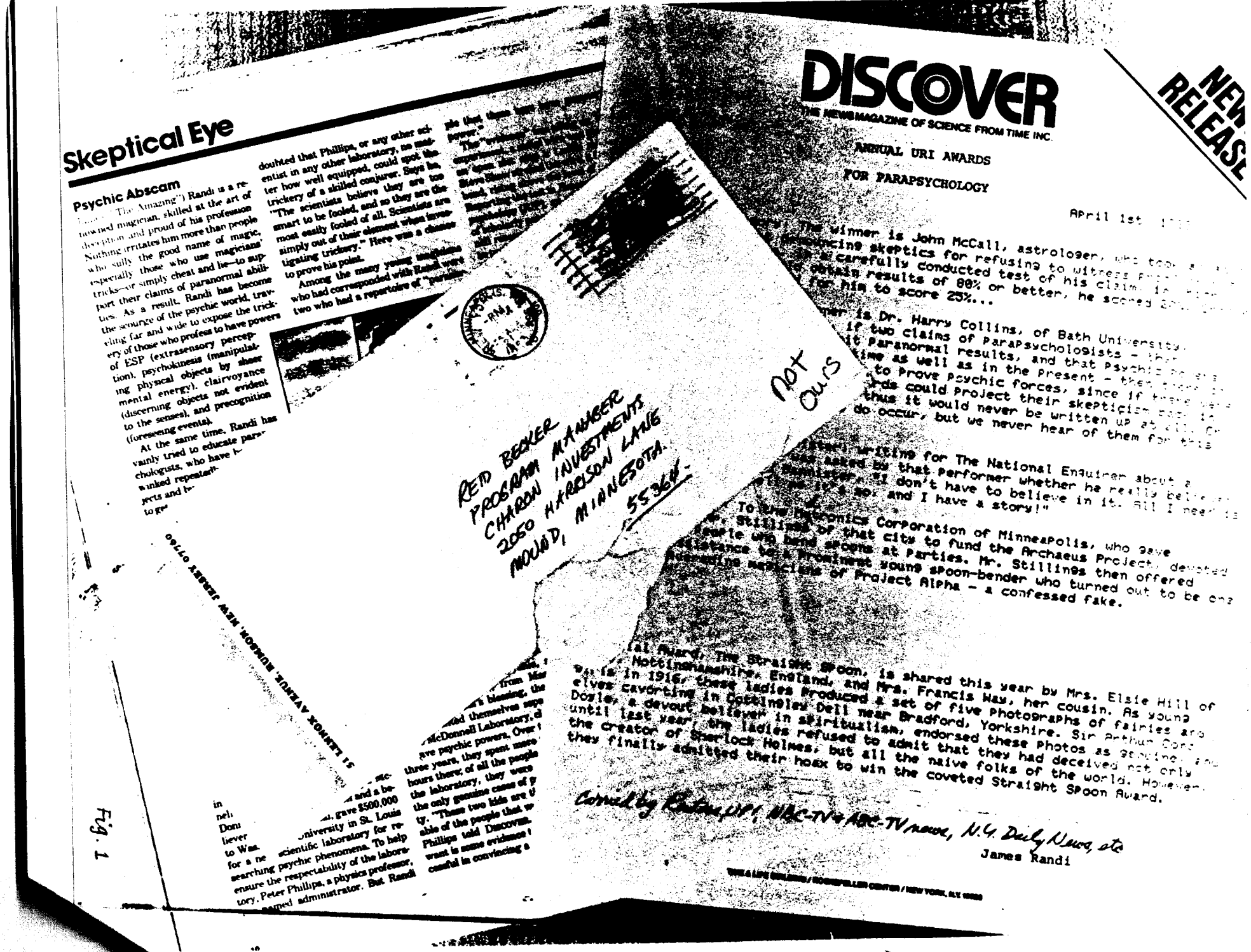
Project ROTSUC was designed as a simple, inexpensive, two-hour exercise in replicating the original experiment of James Randi. We find the implicit conclusion of Project Alpha confirmed, namely: that some, perhaps all, people can be fooled for shorter or longer periods of time, depending on the elaborateness of the scheme and the talent of the deceivers. Using the belief systems of the subjects against them increases effectiveness and extends the period of deception.

Now that we know this, what are we going to do with it? I suggest that we all start behaving like civilized human beings. Knock off the stupid, ill-founded mutual accusations and immediately, dramatically, and permanently exclude from participation in the psi dialogue those who act in bad faith and in contempt of their fellows. Does that sound a bit old-fashioned? Then so be it.

Note: With the end of Project ROTSUC, Phase I, our assignment has been completed. The machinery is in place should a continuance of Project ROTSUC be deemed necessary. We will no longer be participants. Others, however, are ready to continue these efforts.

*This conversation in itself was worthy of a study. See Field Studies in Psi-Pathology, No. 4: "I'll Show You Mine, if You'll Show Me Yours."

In closing, I wish to credit the chief instigator and designer of these projects. He is a member of CSICOP and intimately associated with James Randi. I say this because his identity is not likely to be discovered and because it gives me pleasure to do so. Perhaps this curious gentleman intends to leap to safety just before the Keystone CSICOPS go over the cliff. I don't know. I do know that this individual will help to insure that, in the future, episodes such as Project Alpha become as rare as the Dodo--of which only three are left.



Skeptical Eye

Psychic Abscam

...The Amazing") Randi is a re... trained magician, skilled at the art of deception and proud of his profession. Nothing irritates him more than people who sully the good name of magic, especially those who use magicians' tricks—or simply cheat and lie—to support their claims of paranormal abilities. As a result, Randi has become the scourge of the psychic world, traveling far and wide to expose the trickery of those who profess to have powers of ESP (extrasensory perception), psychokinesis (manipulating physical objects by sheer mental energy), clairvoyance (discerning objects not evident to the senses), and precognition (foreseeing events).

At the same time, Randi has vainly tried to educate parapsychologists, who have b... a naked repeatedly... jects and h... to ge...

doubted that Phillips, or any other scientist in any other laboratory, no matter how well equipped, could spot the trickery of a skilled conjurer. Says he, "The scientists believe they are too smart to be fooled, and so they are the most easily fooled of all. Scientists are simply out of their element when investigating trickery." Here was a chance to prove his point.

Among the many young magicians who had corresponded with Randi were two who had a repertoire of "paranor... ple that, these were ... powers."

...ed themselves supe... McDonnell Laboratory, cl... ave psychic powers. Over t... three years, they spent many... hours there; of all the people ... the laboratory, they were ... the only genuine cases of p... ty. "These two kids are t... able of the people that w... Phillips told Discover. ... want is some evidence! ... careful in convincing a ...

in ... and a be... ...gave $500,000 ... University in St. Louis ... scientific laboratory for re... searching psychic phenomena. To help ensure the respectability of the laboratory, Peter Phillips, a physics professor, ... named administrator. But Randi ...

RED BECKER
PROGRAM MANAGER
CHARON INVESTMENTS
2050 HARRISON LANE
MOUND, MINNESOTA
55364

NOT OURS

DISCOVER
THE NEWS MAGAZINE OF SCIENCE FROM TIME INC.

NEW RELEASE

ANNUAL URI AWARDS
FOR PARAPSYCHOLOGY

April 1st 1...

...winner is John McCall, astrologer, who took nouncing skeptics for refusing to witness carefully conducted test of his claim to certain results of 80% or better, he scored for him to score 25%...

...ner is Dr. Harry Collins, of Bath University if two claims of ParaPsychologists - that it Paranormal results, and that Psychic time as well as in the Present - then to Prove Psychic forces, since if rds could Project their skepticism thus it would never be written up do occur, but we never hear of them for this

...writing for The National Enquirer about a was asked by that performer whether he really Magnetizer. "I don't have to believe in it. All I it is, it's so; and I have a story!"

...To the Electronics Corporation of Minneapolis, who gave Stillings of that city to fund the Archaeus Project, devoted people who hold seances at parties. Mr. Stillings then offered assistance to a prominent young spoon-bender who turned out to be one Researching Magicians of Project Alpha - a confessed fake.

...ial Award, The Straight Spoon, is shared this year by Mrs. Elsie Hill of Nottinghamshire, England, and Mrs. Francis Way, her cousin. As young girls in 1916, these ladies produced a set of five photographs of fairies and elves cavorting in Cottingley Dell near Bradford, Yorkshire. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a devout believer in spiritualism, endorsed these photos as genuine, and until last year, the ladies refused to admit that they had deceived not only the creator of Sherlock Holmes, but all the naive folks of the world. However, ...they finally admitted their hoax to win the coveted Straight Spoon Award.

Conned by Rather, UPI, NBC-TV, ABC-TV news, N.Y. Daily News, etc.
James Randi

...& LIFE BUILDING / ROCKEFELLER CENTER / NEW YORK, N.Y. 10020

Fig. 1

Reid Becker
Program Manager
CHARON INVESTMENTS
2050 Harrison Lane
Mound, Minnesota 55364

June 6th, 1983

Dear Mr. Becker:

I recently heard from you in regard to the awarding of an "Uri" to Medtronics, Inc., of Minneapolis. You should know (as I'm sure you have already heard) that this company has NOT - so far as I know - invested in "psychic research" and that the information about that claim was disseminated by an ex-employee, one Dennis Stillings, who doubtless has his own eccentric reasons for having counterfeited documents to perpetrate this hoax.

If this "joke" of Stillings has caused you any inconvenience, I suggest that you contact him directly to learn of any rationale he may have to offer for his behavior. He can be reached at: 800 S.E. Fourth Street
Minneapolis, MN 55414

There are some strange folks out there, Mr. Becker, and it seems we are all their potential victims. It's a sign of the times we live in...

Yours,

James Randi

Fig. 3

MEMBER INNER MAGIC CIRCLE, LONDON
EXECUTIVE BOARD, COMMITTEE FOR SCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION OF CLAIMS OF THE PARANORMAL
51 LENNOX AVENUE, RUMSON, NEW JERSEY 07760 • PHONE 201-747-1168

CHARON
INVESTMENTS

June 17, 1983

Mr. James Randi
51 Lennox Avenue
Rumson, NJ 07760

Dear Mr. Randi:

I really am rather surprised that you would write to me. It was very fortunate, indeed, that I contacted Mr. Stillings before I gave any advice based on your "award." While I do not approve of the silly games you two are playing, it is certainly clear from Mr. Stillings' documentation of his "trick" that he was not responsible for disseminating this misinformation--you were. You could easily have called Medtronic to clarify the matter. Since they are a publicly owned corporation, they would have told you straight out. In any case, any story of a major corporation giving a large sum directly to something as preposterous as parapsychological research should have tipped you off.

Mr. Stillings caused me no inconvenience, but you might have done so, by amplifying and distorting the inadequate and already falsified data you received. Had I, or any of my colleagues, made any decisions based on your "award", we might all have ended up having a very serious discussion: Medtronic stock subseqently rose some 10 points, and has continued to climb since.

Sincerely,

R Becker

Reid Becker
Program Manager
CHARON INVESTMENTS
2050 Harrison Lane
Mound, Minnesota 55364

RFB:rfb

Fig. 5

ADDENDUM TO

PROJECT ROTSUC, PHASE I

The attached letter from Randi to Mike Edwards was thoughtfully copied and sent to me by JR himself. Those familiar with classic projection, especially in cases of advanced dissociation of the personality, will recognize that--by simple substitution of "James Randi" for "Stillings" throughout--Randi has produced a small gem of unconscious self-characterization.

The first three paragraphs, especially paragraph 3, convey no sense to me. I have received letters from both Krippner and Beloff stating that they have no idea what Mike Edwards or Randi are talking about.

Paragraph 4 is of more interest. Project ROTSUC continues to function! Reid Becker has struck again, but if the reader will refer to Reid Becker's closing epistle, it is clear that he wasn't in good humor. Who the "almost funder" was, I have no idea. The Newsletter material on Project ROTSS was a complete fabrication: There was no "almost funder," or "potential funder," or dream funder--no funder, by thunder!

Some of you may remember the favorite childhood trick of telling some very young child to "look in the garden hose and you can see the stars!" When the child put his eye to the hose, a confederate turned on the water. Usually it was difficult to get the victim to look in the hose again; it sometimes happened, however, that a child would look again and again, no matter how often he was soaked. The joke lost its humor, and one felt a poignant regret for one's actions. Squirting Randi in the eye poses no problem; there is no feeling of regret--only creeping boredom.

It should be noted that on p. 6 of Field Studies in Psi-Pathology, no. 4 ("I'll Show You Mine, If You'll Show Me Yours"), a very good hint about the nature of Project ROTSUC is given: "Mike's remark is a wild exaggeration of ... my planted misinformation." Randi's attitude with regard to careful observation is a clear case of "Do as I say, not as I do."

COPY

Mike Edwards
1890 25th Avenue
Marion, Iowa 52240

July 13th, 1983

Dear Mike:

I just received xeroxes of the transcript of your conversation with Stillings. A copy is attached, so that you may see what he chose to distribute. A perfect example of his disturbed state of mind. I think your first evaluation of him was quite correct.

As far as your interview is concerned, you represented the matter very well, and I'm proud of your direct, frank approach. You told it like you felt it, and that's all I could have asked. But now you will see more clearly the danger of dealing with a nut like Stillings.

Krippner and Beloff will be amazed to discover that Stillings is awaiting responses from them. He should be covered in moss by the time he gets their letters...

I've been in touch with Medtronics and their stockbrokers. The former is just couldn't-care-less about it all, the latter reports that the stock went UP 10 points following the announcement. Both have treated it with good humor, I'm happy to say. Parks can't recall where he got the notion that Medtronics was involved, but from pooling our information, it has become evident just who the almost-funder was. He has since given a sizeable grant to the P.A. for legitimate psi research.

We might do a comparison transcript of this conversation, if you feel anything was grossly enough misrepresented, but all in all, I really couldn't care less. Stillings is a pompous, vituperative, frustrated little man who desperately wants recognition.

You'll be invited to attend the taping by Yorkshire television sometime in August or September. They will contact you directly - a girl named Fiona. Arthur C. Clarke is the host of the series. Fuji TV in Japan also wants an exclusive for that country, to be taped in October. They may want us to do it over there.

I'm sending a copy of this to Stillings, so that he may know directly instead of having to distort some other persons version of the matter. Noblesse oblige, you know...

All for now. See you in October, if not before.

Fig.6

ARCHAEUS PROJECT
800 S.E. FOURTH ST.
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55414
(612) 623-0076

25 May 1983

John Beloff, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
University of Edinburgh
7 George Square
Edinburgh, Scotland EH8 9ZJ

Dear Prof. Beloff:

I recently had a most unpleasant run-in with one of J. Randi's minions, Mike Edwards. During the course of the conversation, Mike asked if I had approached you and Stanley Krippner about "collaborating on a project," and "had been turned down." Well, what can I say? Do you have any notion whatsoever where J.R. & Co. could have gotten such an idea? I have already contacted Stanley Krippner for his response.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Dennis Stillings
Director

DSgd

Fig.7

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH
Department of Psychology
7 GEORGE SQUARE, EDINBURGH EH8 9JZ
031-667 1011, Ext.

Mr Dennis Stillings
Archaeus Project
800 S.E. [illegible]th Street
Minneapolis MN 55414

10 June 1983

Dear Mr Stillings,

Thank you for your communication of 25 May which I found this week on returning from a visit to your country. Since this is the first time that I ever remember hearing from you I can make nothing of Mike Edwards suggestion that you had approached me about collaborating on some project. But does it matter one way or the other ?

Yours Sincerely

John Beloff

Fig.8

ARCHAEUS PROJECT
800 S.E. FOURTH ST.
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55414
(612) 623-0076

5/21/83

Dr. Stanley Krippner
Faculty Chairman
Saybrook Institute
1772 Vallejo Street
San Francisco, CA.
94123

Dear Dr. Krippner,

In a recent, fairly hostile confrontation with Mike Edwards in my office, he asked me whether it was true that I had approached you and John Beloff to collaborate on some project and that you had both refused.

Since I never made such an approach, and do not even have Beloff's address, much less know him, could you give me any indication what might be the basis for Edward's question?

Sincerely yours,

Dennis Stillings

Fig. 9

Saybrook Institute

* John Beloff
Psych. Dept.
U. of Edinburgh
7 George Square 2
Scotland, UKEH8 9JE

June 1983

Dear Mr. Stillings -

The allegation Mike Edwards is making is simply one of many allegations made against me (some of which you have believed) which are completely false.

Sincerely yours,

* PS: Enclosed is Beloff's address

Fig. 10

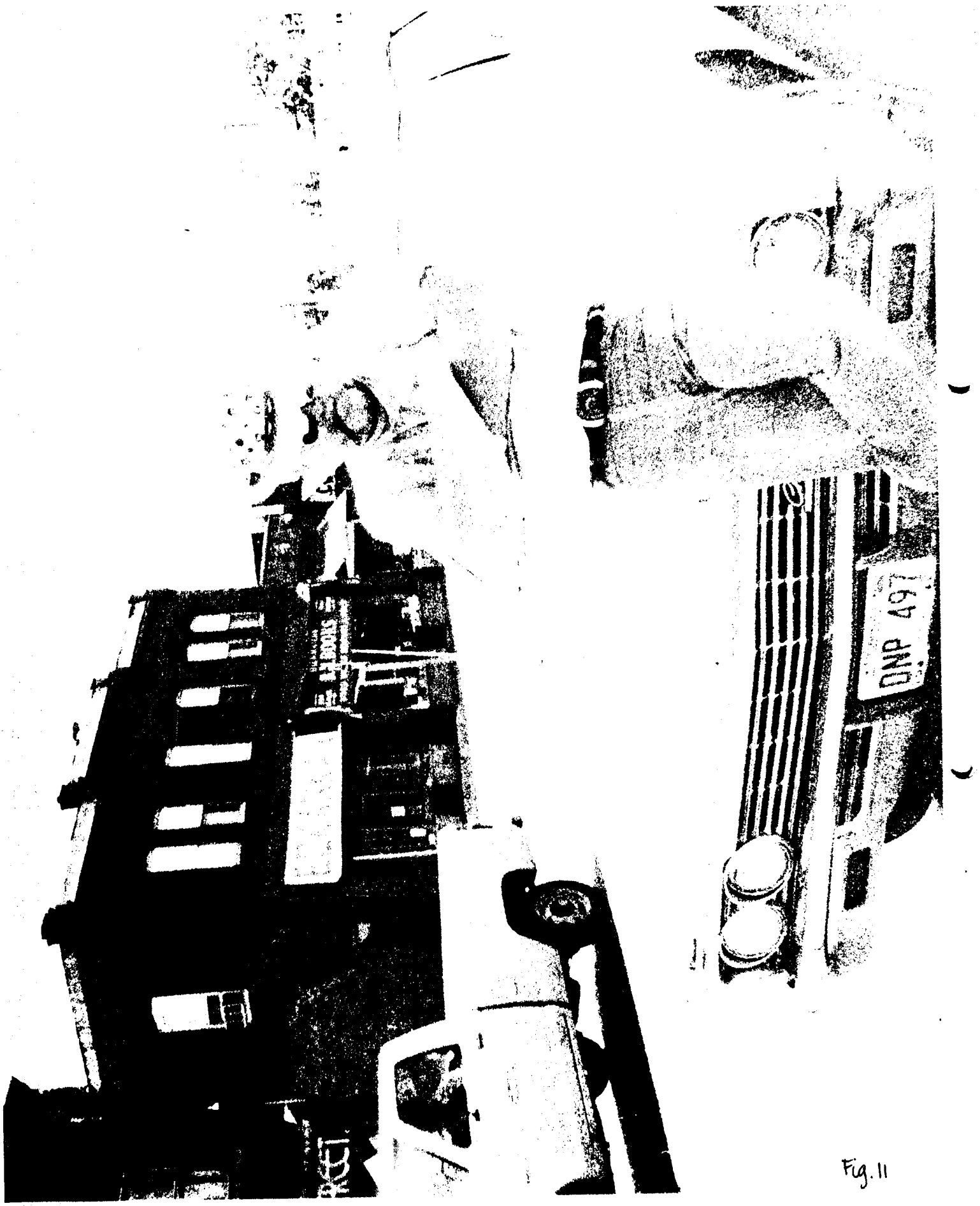


Fig. 11